

The Caste System: 1500 B.C.E. to 1949



JOBS FOR EACH SECTION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM:
Outcast-Out of Caste, Untouchables

Brahmin: only class allowed to be priests, religious leaders of Hinduism, honored and respected by those below them, can study the Vedas (Hindu holy book)

Kshatryia (KUH SHAT REE YUHZ): royalty, rulers, kings, queens, and warriors, expected to protect the people, can study the Vedas (Hindu holy book)

Viasya (VEEZ YUHZ): merchant, peasant, farmers, trade, can study the Vedas (Hindu holy book)

Sudra: the working class, their duty (dharma) is to serve the top three castes, they were not allowed to study the Vedas, or even hear the Vedas read out loud

Untouchables: butchers, gravediggers, collectors of trash, clean human waste, they were seen as unclean or dirty people, usually lived on the outside of a city, were not allowed to go near the other castes, they were not allowed to study the Vedas, or even hear the Vedas read out loud

General Rules of the Caste System

one can't get married to someone outside of their own caste
 can only get a job related to your role in society, ex. Untouchables can only be butchers, gravediggers, etc.
 you have to do your job, ex. If you are a warrior you must protect the people in your society
 caste is determined by heredity (birth)
 people cannot change their social class
 Kshatryia and Brahmin castes held political power

Answer all of the questions/assignments below on a separate sheet of paper. Be sure to re-state the question and write in complete sentences.:

1. What is the Caste System?
2. How can the Caste System be used to control society?
3. What are the pros and cons to the Caste System?
4. How would you describe social mobility in the Caste System?
5. What are the long term and short term impacts of the Caste System?
6. From what you know about the Caste System create a list of possible reasons indicating why people would follow it. Include as many reasons as you can.
7. Compare and contrast the Caste System with other civilizations social hierarchies we have studied. Create a venn diagram for this with as many bullet points as possible (complete sentences not necessary here)
8. If you could change one thing about the Caste system, what would it be? Explain.

Chandragupta Maurya

India unified as a single country for the first time under the rule of the great emperor Chandragupta Maurya (340 BC – 298 BC). Before his rule most of the south Asia was divided into small states or ruled by other Dynasties (families). Chandragupta Maurya conquered most of the Indian subcontinent and gave political unity to India.

It was not the size of India, but rather its cultural diversity that made it difficult to govern (control and organize). To make his empire more easily managed, Chandragupta divided it into smaller regions called provinces—each ruled by a prince and his royal family. Chandragupta's administration of the provinces was so efficient that later conquerors of India kept parts of his system intact for centuries.

1.) Describe at least two things Chandragupta Maurya did that made him an effective leader.

2.) Chandragupta Maurya is well known for uniting India. In your opinion, did the existence of the Caste System make his job easier or more difficult? Explain your answer.

Caste System Information Sheet

What does "Caste" Mean?

Even today, most Indian languages use the term "jati" for the Caste System. This is the system of hereditary social structures in South Asia. When Portuguese travelers to 16th-century India first encountered what appeared to them to be race-based social ranking, they used the Portuguese term "casta" — which means "race" — to describe what they saw. Today, the term "caste" is used to describe societies that are ranked based on hereditary (family) groups not only in South Asia but throughout the world.

The Origins (Beginnings) of the Caste System

It has been impossible to determine the exact origins (beginnings) of the caste system in South Asia. In the midst of the debate, only one thing is certain: South Asia's caste system has been around for several millennia and, until the second half of the 20th century, has changed very little during all of that time.

The Varna Categories

Five varna categories were constructed to organize society along economic and occupational lines. Spiritual leaders and teachers were called Brahmins. Warriors and nobility were called Kshatriyas. Merchants and producers were called Vaishyas. Laborers were called Sudras. The outcasts who literally did the most miserable tasks were called "Untouchables". Untouchables did jobs such as cleaning up after funerals, dealing with sewage and working with animal skin.

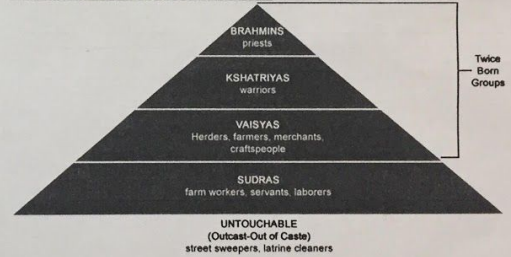
Brahmins were considered very pure, and untouchables were thought of as very polluted. Physical contact between the two groups was absolutely prohibited. Brahmins believed in this rule so strongly that they bathed even if the shadow of an untouchable fell across them.

Comprehension Questions:

- 1.) According to the passages, what determines the particular varna a person is in?

- 2.) Why do you think the Brahmins were considered pure?

Brahma and the origins of caste



- 1.) Where are Untouchables within the Caste System. Use details in your answer.

- 2.) Where are priests located on the Caste System? Why do you think they are located where they are?

- 3.) What does it say about Indian Culture that teachers are at the top of the Caste System hierarchy?
